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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 2, 2016

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**Focus Groups Planned to Improve Services for At-Risk Harford County Youth; Registration Open for Eligible Participants**

**BEL AIR, Md.,** (March 2, 2016) - The Department of Community Services Local Management Board will host two sets of focus groups in the coming weeks to identify potential improvements in child well-being and family services in Harford County. One set of focus groups will be for disconnected youth: teenagers and young adults who are unemployed and no longer enrolled in school. The other set will be for the guardians and caregivers of minor children who have an incarcerated parent or a parent with a history of incarceration. The focus groups are expected to last approximately one hour each. Registration is required; a \$40 stipend and food will be provided to registered participants.

Two focus groups are planned for disconnected youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are unemployed and no longer enrolled in school. The first focus group will meet on Tuesday, March 8 at 12:00 p.m. at the Havre de Grace Housing Authority, 101 Stansbury Ct. in Havre de Grace. Another group will convene on Thursday, March 31 at 11:00 a.m. at the Judy Center, Magnolia Elementary School, 901 Trimble Rd. in Joppa.

There were more than 3,000 disconnected youth living in Harford County in 2015. This diverse group may include high school graduates, high school dropouts, and young adults returned from college and living with their parents. Others may be homeless, or transitioning from foster care or juvenile justice facilities. Disconnected youth often experience poor physical and mental well-being, poor social bonds, family poverty and instability, and juvenile justice or child

welfare intervention. Their communities can experience higher crime rates and a need for increased social services.

Two focus groups are also planned for the guardians and caregivers of minor children who have an incarcerated parent or a parent with a history of incarceration. The first group will meet on Thursday, March 31 at 6:00 p.m. at the Bel Air Library, Room 1, at 100 East Pennsylvania Ave. in Bel Air. The second focus group is set for April 6 at 6:00 p.m. at the Whiteford Library Meeting Room, 2407 Whiteford Rd. in Whiteford. There are an estimated 2,173 children in Harford County with a parent on probation or parole. Approximately 1,023 local children have a parent in state prison.

For more information, or to register for these or any future focus groups, please contact the Local Management Board at 410-638-3389 ext. 1306.

The above focus groups are being presented by the Harford County Local Management Board at the request of the Maryland Governor's Office for Children. The Local Management Board's mission is to assess community assets and needs, facilitate the development of services, and monitor, evaluate, and continually improve outcomes for children, youth and families. The Board operates through the Harford County Department of Community Services Division of Children, Families and Youth.

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